A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED TO THE

STUDENTS

OF THE

ROYAL ACADEMY,

ON THE

Distribution of the Prizes, *Dec.* the 10th, 1774.

BY THE

Reynolds (Sir J.) K.

PRESIDENT.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

A

DISCOURSE, &c.

GENTLEMEN,

WHEN I have taken the liberty of addreſſing you on the courſe and order of your ſtudies, I never propoſed to enter into a minute detail of the Art. This I have always left to the ſeveral Profeſſors, who purſue the end of our inſtitution with the higheſt honour to themſelves, and with the greateſt advantage to the Students.

My purpoſe in the diſcourſes I have held in the Academy is, to lay down certain general Ideas, which ſeem to me proper for the formation of a ſound taſte.-----Principles,

neceſſary to guard the Pupils againſt thoſe errors, into which the ſanguine temper, common at their time of life, has a tendency to lead them; and which have rendered abortive the hopes of ſo many ſucceſſions of promiſing young men in all parts of Europe.

I wiſh alſo, to intercept and ſuppreſs thoſe prejudices, which particularly prevail when the mechaniſm of painting is come to its perfection, and which when they do prevail are certain to prevail to the utter deſtruction of the higher, and more valuable parts of this literate and liberal profeſſion.

Theſe two have been my principal purpoſes; they are ſtill as much my concern, as ever; and if I repeat my own Ideas on the ſubject, you who know how faſt miſtake and prejudice, when neglected, gain ground upon truth and reaſon, will eaſily excuſe me. I only attempt to ſet the ſame thing in the greateſt variety of lights.

The ſubject of this Diſcourſe will be *Imitation*, as far as a Painter is concerned in it. By imitation I do not mean Imitation in its largeſt ſenſe, but ſimply the following of other Maſters, and the advantage to be drawn from the ſtudy of their works.

Thoſe

Thoſe who have undertaken to write on our art, and have repreſented it as a kind of *inſpiration*, as a *gift* beſtowed upon peculiar favourites at their birth, ſeem to inſure a much more favourable diſpoſition from their readers; and have a much more captivating and liberal air, than he who goes about to examine, coldly, whether there are any means by which this Art may be acquired; how our mind may be ſtrengthened and expanded, and what guides will ſhew the way to eminence.

It is very natural for thoſe who are unacquainted with the *cauſe* of any thing extraordinary, to be aſtoniſhed at the *effect*, and to conſider it as a kind of magic. They, who have never obſerved the gradation by which Art is acquired; who ſee only what is the full reſult of long labour and application of an infinite number, and infinite variety of acts, are apt to conclude from their entire inability to do the ſame at once, that it is not only inacceſſible to themſelves, but can be done by thoſe only, who have ſome gift of the nature of inſpiration beſtowed upon them.

The travellers into the Eaſt tell us, that when the ignorant inhabitants of theſe countries are aſked concerning the ruins of ſtately edifices yet remaining amongſt them, the melancholy

melancholy monuments of their former grandeur and long loſt ſcience, they always anſwer, that they were built by magicians. The untaught mind finds a vaſt gulph between its own powers, and theſe works of complicated art, which it is utterly unable to fathom: And it ſuppoſes that ſuch a void can be paſſed only by ſupernatural powers.

And, as for Artiſts themſelves, it is by no means their intereſt to undeceive ſuch judges, however conſcious they may be, of the very natural means by which the extraordinary powers were acquired; our art being intrinſically imitative, rejects this idea of inſpiration more, perhaps, than any other.

It is to avoid this plain confeſſion of truth, as it ſhould ſeem, that this imitation of maſters, indeed, almoſt all imitation, which implies a more regular and progreſſive method of attaining the ends of painting, has ever been particularly inveighed againſt with great keenneſs, both by antient and modern writers.

To derive all from native power, to owe nothing to another, is the praiſe which men, who do not much think what they are ſaying, beſtow ſometimes upon others, and

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ſometimes on themſelves; and their imaginary dignity is naturally heightened by a ſupercilious cenſure of the low, the barren, the groveling, the ſervile imitator. It would be no wonder if a ſtudent, frightened by theſe terrors and diſgraceful epithets, with which the poor imitators are ſo often loaded, ſhould let fall his pencil in mere deſpair; conſcious how much he has been indebted to the labours of others, how little, how very little of his art was born with him; and, conſidering it as hopeleſs, to ſet about acquiring by the imitation of any human maſter, what he is taught to ſuppoſe is matter of inſpiration from heaven.

Some allowance muſt be made for what is ſaid in the gayety or ambition of rhetoric. We cannot ſuppoſe that any one can really mean to exclude all imitation of others. A poſition ſo wild would ſcarce deſerve a ſerious anſwer, for it is apparent, if we were forbid to make uſe of the advantages which our predeceſſors afford us, the art would be always to begin, and conſequently remain always in its infant ſtate; and it is a common obſervation, that no art was ever invented and carried to perfection at the ſame time.

But to bring us entirely to reaſon and ſobriety, let it be obſerved, that a painter muſt not only be of neceſſity an

imitator of the works of nature, which alone is ſufficient to diſpell this phantom of inſpiration, but he muſt be as neceſſarily an imitator of the works of other Painters: This appears more humiliating; but is equally true; and no man can be an artiſt, whatever he may ſuppoſe, upon any other terms.

However, thoſe who appear more moderate and reaſonable, allow, that ſtudy is to begin by imitation, but that we ſhould no longer uſe the thoughts of our predeceſſors, when we are become able to think for ourſelves. They hold that imitation is as hurtful to the more advanced ſtudent, as it was advantageous to the beginner.

For my own part, I confeſs, I am not only very much diſpoſed, to lay down the abſolute neceſſity of imitation in the firſt ſtages of the art; but am of opinion, that the ſtudy of other maſters, which I here call imitation, may be extended throughout our whole life, without any danger of the inconveniencies with which it is charged, of enfeebling the mind, or preventing us from giving that original air which every work undoubtedly ought always to have.

I am on the contrary perſuaded, that by imitation only, variety, and even originality of invention is produced.

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I will go further, even genius, at leaſt what generally is ſo called, is the child of imitation. But as this appears to be contrary to the general opinion, I muſt explain my poſition before I enforce it.

Genius is ſuppoſed to be a power of producing excellencies, which are out of the reach of the rules of Art; a power which no precepts can teach, and which no induſtry can acquire.

This opinion of the impoſſibility of acquiring thoſe beauties, which ſtamp the work with the character of Genius, ſuppoſes, that it is ſomething more fixed than in reality it is; and that we always do, and ever did agree, about what ſhould be conſidered as a characteriſtic of Genius.

But the truth is, that the *degree* of excellence which proclaims *Genius* is different, in different times, and different places; and what ſhows it to be ſo is, that mankind have often changed their opinion upon this matter.

When the Arts were in their infancy, the power of merely drawing the likeneſs of any object, was conſidered as one of its greateſt efforts.

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The common people, ignorant of the principles of art, talk the ſame language, even to this day. But when it was found that every man could be taught to do this, and a great deal more, merely by the obſervance of certain precepts; the name of Genius then ſhifted its application, and was given only to thoſe who added the peculiar character of the object they repreſented; to thoſe who had invention, expreſſion, grace, or dignity; or in ſhort, ſuch qualities, or excellencies, the producing of which, could not *then* be taught by any known and promulgated rules.

We are very ſure that the beauty of form, the expreſſion of the paſſions, the art of compoſition, even the power of giving a general air of grandeur to your work, is at preſent, very much under the dominion of rules. Theſe excellencies were, heretofore, conſidered merely as the effects of genius; and juſtly, if genius is not taken for inſpiration, but as the effect of cloſe obſervation and experience.

He who firſt made any of theſe obſervations and digeſted them, ſo as to form an invariable principle for himſelf to work by, had that merit; but probably no one went very far at once; and generally, the firſt who gave the hint, did not know how to purſue it ſteadily, and methodically;

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at leaſt not in the beginning. He himſelf worked on it and improved it, others worked more, and improved farther, until the ſecret was diſcovered, and the practice made as general, as refined practice can be made. How many more principles may be fixed and aſcertained, we cannot tell; but as criticiſm is likely to go hand in hand with the art which is its ſubject, we may venture to ſay, that as that art ſhall advance, its powers will be ſtill more and more fixed by rules.

But by whatever ſtrides criticiſm may gain ground, we need be under no apprehenſion, that invention will ever be annihilated, or ſubdued; or intellectual energy be brought entirely within the reſtraint of written law. Genius will ſtill have room enough to expatiate, and keep always the ſame diſtance from narrow comprehenſion, and mechanical performance.

What we now call Genius, begins, not, where rules abſtractedly taken, end; but where known vulgar and trite rules have no longer any place. It muſt of neceſſity be, that even works of Genius as well as every other effect, as it muſt have its cauſe, muſt likewiſe have its rules; it cannot be by chance, that excellencies are produced with any

conſtancy, or any certainty, for this is not the nature of chance; but the rules by which men of extraordinary parts, and ſuch as are called men of Genius work, are either ſuch as they diſcover by their own peculiar obſervation, or of ſuch a nice texture, as not eaſily to admit handling, or expreſſing in words, eſpecially as Artiſts are not very frequently ſkillful in that mode of communicating ideas.

Unſubſtantial, however, as theſe rules may ſeem, and difficult as it may be to convey them in writing, they are ſtill ſeen and felt in the mind of the Artiſt, and he works from them with as much certainty, as if they were embodied, as I may ſay, upon paper. It is true, theſe refined principles cannot be always made palpable, like the more groſs rules of art; yet it does not follow, but that the mind may be put in ſuch a train, that it ſhall perceive, by a kind of ſcientifick ſenſe, that propriety, which words, particularly words of unpracticed writers, ſuch as we are, can but very feebly ſuggeſt.

Invention is one of the great marks of genius; but if we conſult experience, we ſhall find, that it is by being converſant with the inventions of others, that we learn to invent; as by reading the thoughts of others we learn to think.

Whoever has ſo far formed his taſte, as to be able to reliſh, and feel the beauties of the great maſters, has gone a great way in his ſtudy; for, merely from a conſciouſneſs of this reliſh of the right, the mind ſwells with an inward pride, and is almoſt as powerfully affected, as if it had itſelf produced, what it admires. Our hearts frequently warmed in this manner, by the contact of thoſe whom we wiſh to reſemble, will undoubtedly catch ſomething of their way of thinking, and we ſhall receive in our own boſoms ſome radiation at leaſt of their fire and ſplendour. That diſpoſition, which is ſo ſtrong in children, ſtill continues with us, of catching involuntarily the general air, and manner, of thoſe with whom we are moſt converſant; with this difference only, that a young mind is naturally pliable and imitative; but in a more advanced ſtate it grows rigid, and muſt be warmed and ſoftened, before it will receive a deep impreſſion.

From theſe conſiderations, which a little of your reflection will carry a great way further, it appears, of what great conſequence it is, that our minds ſhould be habituated to the contemplation of excellence, and that, far from being contented to make ſuch habits, the diſcipline of our youth only, we ſhould, to the laſt moment of our lives,

continue

continue a ſettled intercourſe with all the true examples of grandeur. Their inventions are not only the food of our infancy, but the ſubſtance which ſupplys the fulleſt maturity of our vigour.

The mind is but a barren ſoil; is a ſoil ſoon exhauſted, and will produce no crop, or only one, unleſs it be continually fertiliſed and enriched with foreign matter.

When we have had continually before us the great works of Art to impregnate our minds with kindred ideas; we are then, and not till then, fit to produce ſomething of the ſame ſpecies. We behold all about us with the eyes of theſe penetrating obſervers; and our minds accuſtomed to think the thoughts of the nobleſt and brighteſt intellects, are prepared for the diſcovery and ſelection of all that is great and noble in Nature. The greateſt natural genius cannot ſubſiſt on its own ſtock: he who reſolves never to ranſack any mind but his own, will be ſoon reduced from mere barrenneſs, to the pooreſt of all imitations; he will be obliged to imitate himſelf, and to repeat what he has before often repeated. When we know the ſubject deſigned by ſuch men, it will never be difficult to gueſs what kind of work is to be produced.

It is vain for Painters or Poets to endeavour to invent without materials on which the mind may work, and from which invention muſt originate. Nothing can come of nothing.

Homer is ſuppoſed to be poſſeſſed of all the learning of his time. And we are certain that Michael Angelo, and Raffcelle, were equally poſſeſſed of all the knowledge in the Art which was diſcoverable in the works of their predeceſſors.

A mind enriched by an aſſemblage of all the treaſures of antient and modern Art, will be more elevated and fruitful in reſources in proportion to the number of ideas which have been carefully collected and thoroughly digeſted. There can be no doubt but that he who has the moſt materials has the greateſt means of invention; and if he has not the power of uſeing them, it muſt proceed from a feebleneſs of intellect; or from the confuſed manner in which thoſe collections have been laid up in his mind.

The addition of other men's judgment is ſo far from weakening, as is the opinion of many, our own, that it will faſhion and conſolidate thoſe ideas of excellence which lay

in their birth feeble, illſhaped, and confuſed, but which are finiſhed and put in order by the authority and practice of thoſe, whoſe works may be ſaid to have been conſecrated by having ſtood the teſt of ages.

The mind, or genius has been compared to a ſpark of fire, which is ſmothered by a heap of fewel, and prevented from blazing into a flame: This ſimile which is made uſe of, by the younger Pliny, may be eaſily miſtaken for argument or proof.

There is no danger of the mind's being over-burthened with knowledge, or the genius extinguiſhed by any addition of images; on the contrary, theſe acquiſitions may be as well, perhaps better, be compared, if compariſons ſignified any thing in reaſoning, to the ſupply of living embers, which will contribute to ſtrenghthen the ſpark, that without the aſſociation of more, would have died away.

The truth is, he whoſe feebleneſs is ſuch, as to make other mens thoughts, an incumberance to him, can have no very great ſtrength of mind, or genius of his own to be deſtroyed; ſo that not much harm will be done at worſt.

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We may oppoſe to Pliny, the greater Authority of Cicero, who is continually enforcing the neceſſity of this method of ſtudy. In his Dialogue on Oratory, he makes Craſſus ſay, that one of the firſt and moſt important precepts, is to chooſe a proper model for our imitation. Hoc ſit primum in preceptis meis ut demonſtremus quem imitemur.

When I ſpeak of the habitual imitation, and continued ſtudy of Maſters, it is not to be underſtod, that I adviſe any endeavour to copy the exact peculiar colour, and complexion of another mans mind; the ſucceſs of ſuch an attempt muſt always be like his, who imitates exactly the air, manner, and geſtures, of him whom he admires. His model may be excellent, but the copy will be ridiculous; this ridicule does not ariſe from his having imitated, but from his not having choſen the right mode of imitation.

It is a neceſſary and warrantable pride to diſdain to walk ſervilely behind any individual, however elevated his rank. The true and liberal ground of imitation is an open field, where, though he, who precedes, has had the advantage of ſtarting before you; yet it is enough to purſue his courſe; you need not tread in his footſteps; and you certainly have a right to out-ſtrip him if you can.

Nor whilſt I recommend ſtudying the Art from Artiſts, can I be ſuppoſed to mean, that Nature is to be neglected? I take this ſtudy in aid and not in excluſion of the other. Nature is, and muſt be the fountain which alone is inexhauſtable; and from which all excellencies muſt originally flow.

The great uſe of ſtudying our predeceſſors is, to open the mind, to ſhorten our labour, and to give us the reſult of the ſelection made by thoſe great minds of what is grand or beautiful in Nature: her rich ſtores are all ſpread out before us; but it is an art, and no eaſy art, to know how or what to chooſe, and how to attain and ſecure the object of our choice.

Thus the higheſt beauty of form muſt be taken from Nature; but it is an art of long deduction, and great experience, to know how to find it.

We muſt not content ourſelves with merely admiring and reliſhing; we muſt enter into the principles on which the work is wrought: theſe do not ſwim on the ſuperficies, and conſequently are not open to ſuperficial obſervers.

Art in its perfection is not oſtentatious; it lies hid, and works its effect, itſelf unſeen. It is the proper ſtudy and labour of an Artiſt to uncover and find out the latent cauſe of conſpicuous beauties, and from thence form principles for his own conduct: ſuch an examination is a continual exertion of the mind, as great, perhaps, as that of the Artiſt whoſe works he is thus ſtudying.

The ſagacious imitator, not only remarks what diſtinguiſhes the different manner or genius of each maſter; he enters into the contrivance in the compoſition, how the maſſes of lights are diſpoſed, the means by which the effect is produced, how artfully ſome parts are loſt in the ground, others boldly relieved, and how all theſe are mutually altered and interchanged according to the reaſon and ſcheme of the work. He admires not the harmony of colouring alone, but he examines by what artifice one colour is a foil to its neighbour. He looks cloſe into the tints, of what colours they are compoſed, till he has formed clear, and diſtinct ideas, and has learnt to ſee in what harmony and good colouring conſiſts. What is learnt in this manner from the works of others becomes really our own, ſinks deep, and is never forgotten; nay, it is by ſeizing on this Clue that we proceed forward, and get further and further in enlarging the principle, and improving the practice.

There can be no doubt, but the art is better learnt from the works themſelves, than from the precepts which are formed upon theſe works; but if it is difficult to chooſe proper models for imitation, it requires no leſs circumſpection to ſeparate and diſtinguiſh what in thoſe models we ought to imitate.

I cannot avoid mentioning here, though it is not my intention, at preſent, to enter into the art, and method of ſtudy; an error which ſtudents are too apt to fall into.

He that is forming himſelf, muſt look with great caution and warineſs on thoſe peculiarities, or prominent parts, which at firſt force themſelves upon view; and are the marks, or what is commonly called the manner, by which that individual Artiſt is diſtinguiſhed.

Peculiar marks, I hold, to be generally, if not always, defects; however difficult it may be, wholly to eſcape them.

Peculiarities in the works of Art, are like thoſe in the human figure; it is by them that we are cognizable and diſtinguiſhed one from another, but they are always ſo many

many blemiſhes; which, however, both in the one caſe, and in the other, ceaſe to appear deformities, to thoſe who have them continually before their eyes. In the works of Art, even the moſt enlightened mind, when warmed by beauties of the higheſt kind, will by degrees find a repugnance within him, to acknowledge any defects; nay, his enthuſiaſm will carry him ſo far, as to transform them into beauties, and objects of imitation.

It muſt be acknowledged, that a peculiarity of ſtile, either from its novelty, or by ſeeming to proceed from a peculiar turn of mind, often eſcapes blame; on the contrary, it is ſometimes ſtriking and pleaſing; but this it is vain labour to endeavour to imitate; becauſe novelty, and peculiarity, being its only merit, when it ceaſes to be new, it ceaſes to have value.

A manner, therefore, being a defect, and every Painter, however excellent, having a manner, it ſeems to follow, that all kinds of faults, as well as beauties, may be learned under the ſanction of the greateſt authorities.

Even the great name of Michael Angelo may be uſed, to keep in countenance a deficiency, or rather neglect of colouring, and every other ornamental part of the Art.

If the young Student is dry and hard, Pouſſin is the ſame. If his work has a careleſs and unfiniſhed air; he has moſt of the Venetion ſchool to ſupport him. If he makes no ſelection of objects, but takes individual nature juſt as he finds it; he is like Rembrant. If he is incorrect in the proportions of his figures; Corregio was likewiſe incorrect. If his colours are not blended and united; Rubens was equaly crude.

In ſhort, there is no defect, but may be excuſed, if it is a ſufficient excuſe, that it can be imputed to conſiderable artiſts; but it muſt be remembered, that it was not by theſe defects they acquired their reputation; they have a right to our pardon, but not to our admiration.

However, to imitate peculiarities or miſtake defects for beauties that man will be moſt liable, who confines his imitation to one favourite maſter; and even though he chuſes the beſt, and is capable of diſtinguiſhing the real excellencies of his model; it is not by ſuch narrow practice, that a genius or maſtery in the Art is acquired. A man is as little likely to form a true idea of the perfection of the Art, by ſtudying a ſingle Artiſt, as he would be of producing a perfectly beautiful figure, by an exact imitation of any individual living model.

And as the painter, by bringing together in one piece, thoſe beauties, which are diſperſed amongſt a great variety of individuals, produces a figure more beautiful than can be found in Nature: So that Artiſt who can unite in himſelf the excellencies of the various Painters, will approach nearer to perfection than any one of his maſters.

He, who confines himſelf to the imitation of an individual as he never propoſes to ſurpaſs, ſo he is not likely to equal, the object of imitation. He profeſſes only to follow; and he that follows muſt neceſſarily be behind.

We ſhould imitate the conduct of the great Artiſts in the courſe of their ſtudies, as well as the works which they produced when they were perfectly formed. Raffaelle begun by imitating implicitly the manner of Pietro Perugino, under whom he ſtudied, ſo his firſt works are ſcarce to be diſtinguiſhed from his maſters; but ſoon forming higher, and more extenſive views, he imitated the grand outline of Michael Angelo; he learnt the manner of uſing colours from the works of Leonardo da Vinci, and Fratre Bartolomeo: to all this he added the contemplation of all the remains of antiquity that were within his reach; and employed others to draw for him what was in Greece and

diſtant places. And it is from his having taken ſo many models, that he became himſelf a model for all ſucceeding Painters; always imitating and always original.

If your ambition therefore to be equal Raffaelle, you muſt do as Raffaelle did; take many models, and not take even *him* for your guide alone to the excluſion of others*. And yet the number is infinite of thoſe who ſeem, if one may judge by their ſtile, to have ſeen no other works but thoſe of their maſter, or of ſome favorite, whoſe *manner* is their firſt wiſh, and their laſt.

I will mention a few that occur to me of this narrow, confined, illiberal, unſientifick, and ſervile kind of imitators. Guido was thus meanly copied by Elizabetta, Sirani, and Simone Cantarini. Pouſſin, by Verdier, and Cheron. Parmegiano, by Franceſco Mazzuoli. Paolo Veroneſe, Iacomo Baſſan, had for their imitators their brothers and ſons. Pietro de Cortona was followed by Ciro Ferri, and Romanelli. Rubens, by Jacques Jordans, and Diepenbeck; Guercino, by his own Family, the Gennari. Carlo Marratti was imitated by Geuſeppe Chiari, and Pietro da Pietri. And Rembrant, by Bramer, Eckhout, and Flink.

* Sed non qui maxime imitandus, etiam ſolus imitandus eſt. Quintilian.

All

All theſe, to whom may be added a much longer liſt of painters, whoſe works among the ignorant, paſs for thoſe of their maſters, are juſtly to be cenſured for barrenneſs, and ſervility.

To oppoſe to this liſt, a few that have adopted a more liberal ſtile of imitation. Pelegrino, Tibaldi. Roſſo, and Primaticio did not coldly imitate, but caught ſomething of the fire that animates the works of Michael Angelo. The Carraches formed their ſtile from Pelegrino Tibaldi, Corregio, and the Venetian School. Domenichino, Guido, Lanfranco, Albano, Guercino, Cavidone, Schidone, Tiarini, though it is ſufficiently apparent that they came from the School of the Carraches, have yet the appearance of men who extended their views beyond the model that lay before them, and have ſhewn that they had opinions of their own, and thought for themſelves, after they had made themſelves maſters of the general principles of their ſchools.

Le Seure's firſt manner reſembles very much that of his maſter Vovet; but as he ſoon excelled him, ſo he differed from him in every part of the Art. Carlo Marratti ſuc-ceeded better than thoſe I have firſt named, and I think owes his ſuperiority to the extenſion of his views; beſides his maſter

maſter Andrea Sacci, he imitated Raffaelle, Guido, and the Caraches. It is true, there is nothing very captivating in Carlo Marratti; but this proceeded from wants which cannot be compleatly ſupplied; that is, want of ſtrength of parts. In this, certainly men are not equal, and a man can bring home wares only in proportion to the capital with which he goes to market. Carlo, by diligence, made the moſt of what he had; but there was undoubtedly a heavineſs about him, which extended itſelf, uniformly, to his invention, expreſſion, his drawing, colouring, and the general effect of his pictures. The truth is, he never equalled any of his patterns in any one thing, and he added little of his own.

But we muſt not reſt contented, even in this general ſtudy of the moderns; we muſt trace back the art to its fountain head, to that ſource from whence they drew their principal excellencies, the monuments of pure antiquity.

All the inventions and thoughts of the Antients, whether conveyed to us in ſtatues, baſreliefs, intaglios, cameos, or coins, are to be ſought after and carefully ſtudied: The genius that hovers over theſe venerable reliques, may be called the father of modern art.

From

From the remains of the works of the antients the modern Arts were revived, and it is by their means, that they muſt be reſtored a ſecond time. However it may mortify our vanity, we muſt be forced to allow them our maſters; and we may venture to prophecy, that when they ſhall ceaſe to be ſtudied, Arts will no longer flouriſh, and we ſhall again relapſe into barbariſm.

The fire of the artiſt's own genius operating upon theſe materials which have been thus diligently collected, will enable him to make new combinations, perhaps, ſuperior to what had ever before been in the poſſeſſion of the Art.

As in the mixture of the variety of metals, which are ſaid to have been melted and run together at the burning of Corinth, a new and till then unknown metal was produced equal in value to any of thoſe that had contributed to its compoſition.

And though a curious refiner may come with his crucibles, analyſe and ſeperate its various component parts, yet Corinthian braſs would ſtill hold its rank amongſt the moſt beautiful and valuable of metals.

We have hitherto conſidered the advantages of imitation as it tends to form the taſte, and as a practice by which a ſpark of that genius may be caught which illumines theſe noble works, that ought always to be preſent to our thoughts.

We come now to ſpeak of another kind of imitation; the borrowing a particular thought, an action, attitude, or figure, and tranſplanting it into your own work: this will either come under the charge of plagiariſm, or be warrantable, and deſerve commendation, according to the addreſs with which it is performed. There is ſome difference likewiſe whether it is upon the antients or the moderns that theſe depredations are made. It is generally allowed, that no man need be aſhamed of copying the antients: their works are conſidered as a magazine of common property, always open to the public, whence every man has a right to what materials he pleaſes; and if he has the art of uſing them, they are ſuppoſed to become to all intents and purpoſes his own property.

The collection which Raffaelle made of the thoughts of the antients with ſo much trouble, is a proof of his opinion on this ſubject. Such collections may be made with

with much more eaſe, by means of an art ſcarce known in his time; I mean that of engraving, by which, at an eaſy rate, every man may now avail himſelf of the inventions of antiquity.

It muſt be acknowledged that the works of the moderns are more the property of their authors; he, who borrows an idea from an artiſt, or perhaps from a modern, not his contemporary, and ſo accommodates it to his own work, that it makes a part of it, with no ſeam or joining appearing, can hardly be charged with plagiariſm; poets practiſe this kind of borrowing, without reſerve. But an artiſt ſhould not be contented with this only; he ſhould enter into a competition with his original, and endeavour to improve, what he is appropriating to his own work. Such imitation is ſo far from having any thing in it of the ſervility of plagiariſm, that it is a perpetual exerciſe of the mind, a continual invention.

Borrowing or ſtealing with ſuch art and caution, will have a right to the ſame lenity as was uſed by the Lacedemonians; who did not puniſh theft, but the want of artifice to conceal it.

In order to encourage you to imitation, to the utmoſt extent, let me add, that very finiſhed Artiſts in the inferior branches of the art, will contribute to furniſh the mind and give hints, of which a ſkilful painter, who is ſenſible of what he wants, and is in no danger of being infected by the contact of vicious models, will know how to avail himſelf. He will pick up from dunghills what by a nice chymiſtry, paſſing through his own mind, ſhall be converted into pure gold; and, under the rudeneſs of Gothic eſſays, he will find original, rational, and even ſublime inventions.

In the luxuriant ſtile of Paul Veroneſe, in the capricious compoſitions of Tintoret, he will find ſomething, that will aſſiſt his invention and give points, from which his own imagination ſhall riſe and take flight, when the ſubject which he treats, will, with propriety admit of ſplendid effects.

In every ſchool, whether Venetian, French, or Dutch, he will find, either ingenious compoſitions, extraordinary effects, ſome peculiar expreſſions, or ſome mechanical excellence, well worthy his attention, and, in ſome meaſure, of his imitation; even in the lower claſs of the French painters, great beauties are often found united with great defects.

Though

Though Coypel wanted a ſimplicity of taſte, and miſtook a preſumptuous and aſſuming air for what is grand and majeſtic; yet he frequently has good ſenſe and judgment in his manner of telling his ſtories, great ſkill in his compoſitions, and is not without a conſiderable power of expreſſing the paſſions. The modern affectation of grace in his works, as well as in thoſe of Boucher and Watteau, may be ſaid to be ſeparated, by a very thin partition, from the more ſimple and pure grace of Coreggio and Parmegiano.

Amongſt the Dutch painters, the correct, firm, and determined pencil, which was employed by Bamboccio and Jan Miel, on vulgar and mean ſubjects, might, without any change, be employed on the higheſt, to which, indeed, it ſeems more properly to belong. The greateſt ſtile, if that ſtile is confined to ſmall figures, ſuch as Pouſſin generally painted, would receive an additional grace, by the elegance and preciſion of pencil ſo admirable in the works of Teniers.

Though this ſchool more particularly excelled in the mechaniſm of painting, yet there are many, who have ſhewn great abilities in expreſſing what muſt be ranked above mechanical excellencies.

In the works of Frank Halls, the portrait painter may obſerve the compoſition of a face; the features well put together, as the painters expreſs it, from whence proceeds that ſtrong marked character of individual nature, which is ſo remarkable in his portraits, and is not to be found in an equal degree in any other painter. If he had joined to this moſt difficult part of the Art, a patience in finiſhing what he had ſo correctly planned, he might juſtly have claimed the place which Vandyke, all things conſidered, ſo juſtly holds as the firſt of portrait painters. Others of the ſame ſchool have ſhewn great power in expreſſing the character and paſſions of thoſe vulgar people, which are the ſubjects of their ſtudy and attention.

Amongſt thoſe Jean Stein ſeems to be one of the moſt diligent and accurate obſervers of what paſſed in thoſe ſcenes which he frequented, and which were to him an academy. I can eaſily imagine, that if this extraordinary man had had the good fortune to have been born in Italy, inſtead of Holland, had he lived in Rome inſtead of Leyden, and had been bleſſed with Michael Angelo and Raffaelle for his maſters, inſtead of Brower and Van Gowen; that the ſame ſagacity and penetration which diſtinguiſhed ſo accurately the different characters and expreſſion in his vulgar figures,

would

would, when exerted in the ſelection and imitation of what was great and elevated in Nature, have been equally ſucceſsful, and his name would have been now ranged with the great pillars and ſupporters of our Art.

Men who although thus bound down by the almoſt invincible powers of early habits, have ſtill exerted extraordinary abilities within their narrow and confined circle, and have, from the natural vigour of their mind, given ſuch an intereſting expreſſion, ſuch force and energy to their works, though they cannot be recommended to be exactly imitated, may yet invite an Artiſt to endeavour to transfer, by a kind of parody, thoſe excellencies to his own works. Whoever has acquired the power of making this uſe of the Flemiſh, Venetian, and French ſchools, is a real genius, and has ſources of knowledge open to him which were wanting to the great Artiſts who lived in the great age of Painting.

To find excellencies, however diſperſed, to diſcover beauties, however concealed by the multitude of defects with which they are ſurrounded, can be the work only of him who having a mind always alive to his Art, has extended his views to all ages and to all ſchools; and has acquired from

from that comprehenſive maſs which he has thus gathered to himſelf, a well-digeſted and perfect idea of his Art, to which every thing is referred.

Like a ſovereign judge and arbiter of Art, he is poſſeſſed of that preſiding power which ſeparates and attracts every excellence from every ſchool; ſelects both from what is great, and what is little; brings home knowledge from the Eaſt and from the Weſt; making the univerſe tributary towards furniſhing his mind and enriching his works with originality, and variety of inventions.

Thus I have ventured to give my opinion of what appears to me the true, and only method, by which an Artiſt makes himſelf maſter of his profeſſion; which I hold ought to be one continued courſe of imitation that is not to ceaſe but with our lives.

Thoſe, who either from their own engagements and hurry of buſineſs, or from indolence, or from conceit and vanity, have neglected looking out of themſelves, as far as my experience and obſervation reaches, have from that time, not only ceaſed to advance, and improve in their performance but have gone backward. They may be compared to men who

who have lived upon their principal 'till they are reduced to beggary, and left without reſources.

I can recommend nothing better therefore, than that you endeavour to infuſe into your works what you learn from the contemplation of the works of others.

To recommend this has the appearance of needleſs and ſuperfluous advice; but it has fallen within my own knowledge, that Artiſts, though they are not wanting in a ſincere love for their Art, though they have great pleaſure in ſeeing good pictures, and are well ſkilled to diſtinguiſh what is excellent or defective in them, yet go on in their own manner, without any endeavour to give a little of thoſe beauties, which they admire in others, to their own works. It is difficult to conceive how the preſent Italian Painters, who live in the midſt of the treaſures of art, ſhould be contented with their own ſtile. They proceed in their common place inventions, and never think it worth while to viſit the works of thoſe great artiſts with which they are ſurrounded.

I remember, ſeveral years ago, to have converſed at Rome with an Artiſt of great fame throughout Europe; he was not

 without

without a conſiderable degree of abilities, but thoſe abilities were by no means equal to his own opinion of them. From the reputation he had acquired, he too fondly concluded that he ſtood in the ſame rank, when compared to his predeceſſors, as he held with regard to his miſerable contemporary rivals.

In converſation about ſome particulars of the works of Raffaelle, he ſeemed to have, or to affect to have, a very obſcure memory of them. He told me that he had not ſet his foot in the Vatican for fifteen years together; that indeed he had been in treaty to copy a capital picture of Raffaelle, but that the buſineſs had gone off; however, if the agreement had held, his copy would have greatly exceeed the original. The merit of this Artiſt, however great we may ſuppoſe it, I am ſure would have been far greater, and his preſumption would have been far leſs, if he had viſited the Vatican, as in reaſon he ought to have done, once at leaſt every month of his life.

I addreſs myſelf, Gentlemen, to you who have made ſome progreſs in the art, and are to be for the future, under the guidance of your own judgment and diſcretion.

I conſider you as arrived to that period, when you have a right to think for yourſelves, and to preſume, that every man is fallible; to ſtudy the maſters with a ſuſpicion, that great men are not always exempt from great faults; to criticiſe, compare, and rank their works in your own eſtimation, as they approach to, or recede from, that ſtandard of perfection which you have formed in your own mind, but, which thoſe maſters themſelves, it muſt be remembered, have taught you to make; and, which you will ceaſe to make with correctneſs, when you ceaſe to ſtudy them. It is their excellencies which have taught you their defects.

I would wiſh you to forget where you are, and who it is that ſpeaks to you. I only direct you to higher models, and better adviſers. We can teach you here but very little; you are henceforth to be your own teachers. Do this juſtice, however, to the Engliſh Academy, to bear in mind, that in this place, you contracted no narrow habits, no falſe ideas, nothing that could lead you to the imitation of any living maſter, who may be the faſhionable darling of the day. As you have not been taught to flatter us, do not learn to flatter yourſelves. We have endeavoured to lead you to the admiration of nothing but what is truly admirable. If you chooſe inferior patterns, or if you make

your

your own *former* works, your patterns for your *latter*, it is your own fault.

The purpoſe of this Diſcourſe, and, indeed, of moſt of my others, is to caution you againſt that falſe opinion, but too prevalent amongſt Artiſts, of the imaginary power of native genius, and its ſufficiency in great works. This opinion, according to the temper of mind it meets with, almoſt always produces, either a vain confidence, or a ſluggiſh deſpair, both equally fatal to all proficiency.

Study therefore the great works of the great maſters, for ever. Study as nearly as you can, in the order, in the manner, on the the principles, on which they ſtudied. Study nature attentively, but always with thoſe maſters in your company; conſider them as models which you are to imitate, and at the ſame time as rivals, which you are to combat.

FINIS.

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